

‘Knowing Differently: Presenting an Approach for Shifting Paradigms in changing times.’

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Summary

This paper will

- Briefly review the current position of paradigm analysis with a view to showing the lack of systematic approaches for moving from an existing paradigm to a new one.
- Propose a systematic approach for moving from old to new paradigms called paradigm shifting that highlights the assumptions of existing paradigms, shows the internal inconsistencies of those assumptions, and develops an alternative potential paradigm that addresses those inconsistencies.
- Consider the potential contribution to and limitations of this approach to paradigm shifting for the field of paradigm analysis.

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This paper proposes a conceptual Paradigm Shifting Approach (PSA) that responds to Hamel (2007) who argued that management practice is governed by anachronistic paradigms and exhorted managers and management researchers to shift to another paradigm complete with newer practices. In so doing, he was, according to Grant (2008), following in a long tradition of scholars who have stressed a shift from old to new management paradigms.

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- Briefly review the current position of paradigm analysis with a view to showing the lack of systematic approaches for moving from an existing paradigm to a new one.
- Propose a systematic approach for moving from old to new paradigms called paradigm shifting that highlights the assumptions of existing paradigms, shows the internal inconsistencies of those assumptions, and develops an alternative potential paradigm that addresses those inconsistencies.
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Current Paradigm Analysis

Management paradigms are, as Burrell (2002) pointed out, an import from sociology. Indeed, paradigm thinking originated in the work of Kuhn in 1962 on the progress of science before being introduced into management and organisation studies by Burrell and Morgan (1979) in their examination of paradigms in existence in organisational analysis.

From the start, the notion of paradigms has been a widely disputed one. There have been disagreements over the definition of the term with even Kuhn (2000) conceding that he defined paradigms in 22 different ways. There has also been some debate surrounding how broadly to define paradigms with paradigms being seen both in broad terms as all-embracing, philosophical worldviews (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kuhn, 1970) and in narrow terms as accepted solutions to problems (Kuhn, 1970). The final, and arguably most important, area of conflict is that relating to how well competing paradigms can be translated into a common neutral language – also known as the problem of incommensurability (Kuhn, 2000). Here, there are a variety of differing opinions ranging from those, held by Mora et al (2007), advocating that paradigms are commensurable, to those held by Kuhn (1970) and Schultz and Hatch (1996) that stress that paradigms are comparable yet fundamentally incommensurable, to those at the other extreme, held by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Schultz and Leidner (2002), who see paradigms as mutually exclusive.

The proposed Paradigm Shifting Approach

The paradigm shifting approach originates in the emancipatory interest of critical theory. This seeks to identify various kinds of domination like traditions, ideologies and paradigms and to liberate people from such conditions by questioning their taken-for-granted, value-free, natural, and given nature (Willmott, 2003). This questioning involves three tasks: (a) gaining insight into a particular phenomenon by combining elements in such a way as to gain a new understanding of it; (b) critiquing that insight by unmasking the inherent contradictions and marginalised perspectives; and (c) creating a transformative redefinition through an imaginative process of developing ‘new ways of seeing and thinking’ that enable more democratic ‘ways of operating’ (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Taking an emancipatory interest to the problems of paradigms yields a paradigm shifting strategy that proceeds through the three stages of paradigmatic awareness, paradigmatic critique, and developing a paradigmatic alternative.

The first stage is that of instilling paradigmatic awareness which seeks to gain an insight into the nature of the dominant paradigm by integrating the theoretical perspectives of the various schools of thought to highlight its underlying assumptions (Harrison et al, 2007). The method used to instil this awareness is that of an integrative literature review. Such a method is well suited to addressing the vagueness of a given paradigm because it integrates a variety of items in order to reveal hidden aspects as unexamined or unexplored assumptions (Speicher, 1997). Given that paradigmatic assumptions are shared across many schools of thought, the items to be integrated are the different theoretical perspectives held by the various schools of thought which relate to a given paradigm.

The process of integrating these perspectives is a three-stage one. Firstly, a conceptual structure for the review is constructed around a set of premises that can be drawn from any theory or model (Torraco, 2005) but, given that paradigms reflect certain philosophical assumptions, are drawn from the philosophical foundations of the paradigm itself. From there, the conceptual structure is used as a template for reviewing the relevant literature – in this case, the various schools of thought relating to the paradigm in question – in order to elucidate the assumptions held by each school. Finally, the various individual assumptions are integrated around the philosophical premises that comprise the initial conceptual structure so as to highlight common assumptions underlying a given paradigm.

The paradigmatic assumptions resulting from the integrative literature review are then subjected to paradigmatic critique that aims to encourage an appreciation of the underlying fundamental anomalies of the existing paradigm (Harrison et al, 2007). One means of engaging in such a critique is deconstructive analysis. Although not necessarily deconstruction per se, deconstructive analysis is invested with the same spirit as the original term. This is because it is a ‘destabilizing’ (Chia, 1996) technique for reading texts through a ‘series of moves’ (Newman, 2001) intended to reveal the self-contradictions that are inherent yet suppressed by the structure of the text (Chia, 1996). Since the aim of the analysis here is to identify the anomalies inherent in the assumptions of a paradigm, the ‘text’ to be read is not a particular piece of political, social, or philosophical discourse as in traditional deconstruction (Cooper, 1989). Instead, the text is made up of the paradigmatic assumptions identified through the integrative literature review.

The main moves in reading this text are identifying violent hierarchies and *différance*. The former aims to illustrate the primacy of one paradigmatic assumption over the others and involves identifying the hierarchical structure of the paradigm in the form of ‘binary opposites’ (Newman, 2001) of one superior and one subordinate one (Derrida, 1981). *Différance* undermines this hierarchy by highlighting its intrinsic contradictions through what Derrida (1981) calls a ‘play of differences’. This play involves a ‘double science’ (Derrida, 1981) of inversion and subversion: inversion involves showing that the subordinate assumption is a necessary ‘supplement’ (Derrida, 1991) to the meaning of the superior one by inverting the hierarchy so that the subordinate assumption is made superior and vice versa; and subversion involves dismantling the hierarchy altogether (Newman, 2001).

The final stage of paradigm shifting is that of developing a paradigmatic alternative which promotes the creation of new ways of thinking and seeing out of the anomalous crisis of existing paradigm (Chia, 1996). The method employed here for developing such alternatives is that of analogical reasoning. This involves the drawing and integration of analogies between a source and a target domain (Tsoukas, 1991). It is appropriate for revising a paradigm for two reasons. Firstly, it is a systematic method that enables the ‘crossing of images’ and ‘selective comparison’ between two domains that stresses some aspects and

underemphasises others, and is deemed to be essential for the reframing of paradigms (Morgan, 1980). Secondly, this selective comparison, by virtue of paying “attention to hitherto unsuspected, or only peripherally relevant, features of an object of study” (Tsoukas, 2005, p.223), is apt for reframing a paradigm in a way that addresses its inherent anomalies.

Engaging in analogical reasoning requires adopting Tsoukas’ (1991) three stage technique. Firstly, the source and target domains are identified according to three criteria: (a) that they are similar; (b) that the source domain is the more valid, systematic, coherent, and informative body of knowledge; and (c) that the two domains provide the most promising basis for addressing the anomalies of the paradigm. After the domains have been selected, the next stage of analogical reasoning is to draw analogies between the source and target domain. This is done by transferring relationships from the source domain to the target in such a way that similarities and differences are discerned and transformed in an isomorphic manner. The final step in analogical reasoning is to retain the systematicity of the source domain through the integration of the individual analogies in a way that represents the systematic body of knowledge present in the source domain (Markman & Gentner, 2001).

Thus, the paradigm shifting approach is essentially a nine-step process of inquiry which systematically attempts to shift one’s thinking from a dominant paradigm to a liberating alternative. It does so by instilling awareness of the dominant paradigm via an integrative literature review before critiquing that paradigm through a deconstructive analysis and then developing a fundamental alternative using analogical reasoning.

Discussion on the Contributions and Limitations of the Paradigm Shifting Approach

The paradigm shifting approach contributes to paradigm analysis in a number of ways. The first three are practical contributions to the domain to which it is applied. The first of these is that, through the integrative literature review, the approach shows what actors in that domain currently do by revealing the common assumptions that guide and bound their activities.

In addition to showing what actors in a particular management domain currently do, the paradigm shifting approach also shows what they cannot do. This it does via the deconstructive analysis that shows the limits of practice by showing the inherent inconsistencies of the underlying paradigm.

In addition to the practical contributions, the paradigm shifting approach also contributes to the field of paradigm analysis. First of all, it adds to the pantheon of paradigmatic inquiry techniques already in existence. As already highlighted in the introduction, there are strategies for elucidating paradigms implicit in various schools of thought, integrating multiple paradigms into a single meta-paradigm, positioning multiple paradigms, and comparing and contrasting paradigms. What has, to date, been lacking has been a strategy for challenging and fundamentally revising paradigms. This shortcoming can be addressed by the paradigm shifting approach which, via the methods of integrative literature review, deconstructive and analogical reasoning, seeks to provide insight into the existing paradigm, critique it, and then provide a new way of thinking and seeing in the form of a revised alternative paradigm.

The second contribution is that it makes up for the lack of systematic, methodological approach to shifting paradigms by going through a three stage process that tries to ascertain the assumptions of the paradigm, critique them and then develop a fundamental revision. Such a process could replace mere entreaties for the need to shift paradigms in response to perceived limitations in the existing paradigm by providing a means of highlighting the limits

through deconstructive analysis and of moving from those limits to a new potential paradigm via analogical reasoning. The paradigm shifting approach would circumvent the imposition of paradigms on pre-paradigmatic field by providing the means of elucidating the paradigm implicit in the diverse schools of thought in the shape of an integrative literature review and then using that paradigm as the basis for critique and revision.

Thirdly, the paradigm shifting approach provides a bridge between single paradigm and multiple paradigm approaches by looking at two paradigmatic views – the dominant one and a liberating alternative. Consequently, these two paradigms can provide the starting point for multiple paradigm analysis that would seek to position the two along continua, paradigm crossing techniques that would compare and contrast the two, and paradigm integration approaches that would endeavour to integrate the views into a new meta-paradigm.

However, employing the paradigm shifting approach is not without its limitations. The first relates to what Maton (2003) calls ‘reflexive regression’, whereby, in a manner much like the research cycle of self-critique whereby the researcher begins, “doubting the doubting and the doubts” (Weick, 1999). Paradigm shifting can suffer from such a regression by falling prey to an endless cycle of critiquing the critiquing and the critique. By this is meant that the alternative emanating from a round of paradigm shifting like the process view of entrepreneurship can itself become a focus for further paradigm shifting which produces another alternative which itself becomes a focus for further paradigm shifting and so on.

The second limitation concerns the emancipatory stance of paradigm shifting. This stance suggests that ideas are valid if and only if they fundamentally challenge existing dogmas and, through that challenge, point to new ways of acting that emancipate research subjects from the repressive, oppressive and dominating conditions brought about by existing dogmas. With regards paradigm shifting this means that the liberating alternative developed through analogical reasoning should fundamentally challenge the existing dominant paradigm, and, in so doing, point to new ways of acting that free actors from the repressive, oppressive, and dominating conditions brought forth by adopting the existing paradigm. However, in so doing, there may be a danger of replacing one dogma with another (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992).

The third limit results from endeavouring to differentiate, compare, and contrast the existing dominant paradigm with the liberating alternative that implies that both are equally generalised across disciplines. However, in keeping with the underpinning critical theory, the paradigm shifting approach does not seek to replace one universal, taken-for-granted paradigm with another but, instead, wishes to engender discussion and debate by presenting a fundamentally different way of thinking to that encapsulated by the dominant paradigm (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Wilmott, 2003). Also, whilst the paradigm shifting approach reflects Kuhn’s (1996) suggestion that alternatives to dominant paradigms can come from the mind of a single individual, the process of shifting from one paradigm to another is a social one involving persuasion and conflict. Thus, whilst a liberating alternative such as the process-view of entrepreneurship can be presented as an alternative conceptualisation to the dominant view it is not a shared conceptualisation because it has not permeated the various areas where the individualist view of entrepreneurship is found.

Conclusion

This paper presented a paradigm shifting approach that is intended to challenge existing paradigms and prompts shifts to plausible paradigmatic alternatives. Such an approach can contribute to both the specific management domain to which it is applied and to the more

general field of paradigm analysis. The domain specific contributions are an indication of what actors in a particular domain currently do, what they cannot do, and what they can do: what actors currently do is indicated using an integrative literature review which reveals the common assumptions that guide and bound current action; what actors cannot do is indicated by a deconstructive analysis that elucidates the inherent inconsistencies in the common assumptions guiding current action; and what actors can do is indicated by an analogical reasoning technique that produces an alternative paradigm that points to liberating new ways of acting.

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